

On Wednesday, St. Charles Missouri was the scene of a study in contrasts:

2225 people crowded into my free and open town hall meeting.

450 people attended President Obama's invitation only event.

In one room, people were insisting that government leave them alone and allow them to pursue their own happiness. In the other room, people were insisting that government solve their problems and provide for their needs. In one room, health care reform was about increasing choice and reducing third party intrusion into doctor-patient decisions. In the other room, health care reform was about requiring everyone to participate in a government managed system that increases costs and reduces choices.

The contrasts in Washington are just as stark.

The White House, the House and the Senate are controlled by the Democratic Party. Yet the President, Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid can't agree with their fellow Democrats on exactly how much control government bureaucrats should have over your health care decisions. They can't agree on how much they should tax us so they can exercise this control. They can't agree on how much more debt we should assume to pay for their "health care" bill. And they can't agree on whether all taxpayers should have to pay for abortions that many oppose.

My Republican colleagues and I do not have the votes to stop a united Democratic Party from enacting their plan. We have our own proposals to reform our health care system – to fix what's broken without breaking what works. But while the White House talks bipartisanship, bipartisan action has had all the visibility of the proverbial needle in a haystack.

Even as I write this, my Democratic colleagues are trying to figure out how to pass the President's health care proposal without actually voting on it. What's more, this proposal isn't even a bill yet – a bill that can be read and considered by the American people and their representatives. Speaker Pelosi has even said that "we have to pass the bill so that you can find out what is in it." Somehow, I think that's a little backwards.

Finally, a deep contrast exists over how we view the Constitution. As I said in my town hall meeting this week, the federal government simply doesn't have the Constitutional authority to require individuals to buy any product or service, including health insurance. Yet Speaker Pelosi and her colleagues have mocked the idea that their legislative powers are bounded by the Constitution.

These contrasts over how we should reform health care are emblematic of a far deeper discussion: what is our vision for the next century of the American experiment?

Will we, as a nation, hold fast to the liberty our founding fathers and mothers secured for us? Or will we increasingly follow a European socialist model, where most decisions in our lives are made by unelected bureaucrats and our economy is crushed under the weight of expanding entitlement programs that force our debt ever higher. In the end, only the American people can decide the future of their country. This week, I was encouraged by the thousands who spoke up for liberty in St. Louis.

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